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Health Update: New Publications Regarding Medical Use of Marijuana – 24 June 2015

Action requested: Healthcare providers who authorize the use of medical marijuana should be aware of recent publications in the June 23, 2015 issue of Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) that provide useful reviews of the evidence for the effectiveness and the health risks and benefits of the use of medical marijuana (see attachments attached).

Background: Licensed healthcare providers in Washington State may authorize the medical use of cannabis for qualifying patients with terminal or debilitating medical conditions (<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=69.51a&full=true>). There is some evidence to support the use of marijuana for nausea and vomiting related to chemotherapy, specific pain syndromes, and spasticity from multiple sclerosis. However, for most other indications that may qualify by state law for use of medical marijuana, the evidence supporting its use is of poor quality and fails to meet FDA standards.

Medical marijuana and cannabinoids have health risks and benefits. Acute effects of marijuana have been described (and are reviewed in the articles) however, there are no studies of long term potential adverse health effects of marijuana use.

The JAMA review suggests that medical marijuana evaluations should be comprehensive assessments that include risk-benefit discussions with the patient. Authorization for medical marijuana use should only be written by healthcare providers who have thoroughly assessed a patient, know him or her well, and have a full understanding of the patient's debilitating condition requiring treatment. If the certification does not come from the patient's primary care physician or the specialist treating the debilitating condition, the certifying healthcare provider should communicate with the patient's other health care clinicians in the same manner as any other specialists would be expected to.

References

- Whiting et al. [Cannabinoids for Medical Use. A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis](#). JAMA. 2015;313(24):2456-2473
- Hill K. [Medical Marijuana for Treatment of Chronic Pain and Other Medical and Psychiatric Problems. A Clinical Review](#). JAMA. 2015;313(24):2474-2483.
- D'Souza C. [Medical Marijuana - Is the Cart Before the Horse?](#) JAMA. 2015;313(24):2431-2432.
- JAMA Patient Page[FREE] – [Medical Marijuana](#)